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SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA APPRECIATES EFFORTS TO AVERT GENOCIDE  
RESOLUTION; AMBASSADOR REVIEWS ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH ISSUES

REF: SECSTATE 101834

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an April 11 meeting with Ambassador, MFA U/S (D equivalent) Ertugrul Apakan expressed appreciation for US Administration efforts to avert a congressional Armenian genocide resolution and asked about language of the Presidential proclamation that would be issued on the occasion of Armenian Remembrance Day. He also referred to a letter to PM Erdogan apparently being prepared by Reps Lantos and Ros-Lehtinen on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and the Halki Seminary. Ambassador used the occasion to review the reasons why forthcoming GOT measures on both sets of issues are needed. End summary.

¶2. (C) Apakan expressed GOT appreciation for continued USG efforts to avert passage of a congressional Armenian genocide resolution. Ambassador used the occasion to deliver President Bush's response to PM Erdogan on the topic (reftel). The Turks are now focused on the wording of the Presidential proclamation that will be issued April 24 for Armenian Remembrance Day. Ambassador responded that while we had not seen a draft, it is likely to be very close in language to previous years' statements.

¶3. (C) Apakan then referred to a draft letter to PM Erdogan that the Turkish Embassy in Washington has learned Reps Lantos and Ros-Lehtinen are preparing, apparently expressing concern regarding the Greek community in Istanbul, continued viability of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the reopening of Halki Seminary and related religious freedom issues.

¶4. (C) Ambassador used the opportunity to review the state of play of Ecumenical Patriarchate issues, including the fate of the Patriarch himself, the status of Halki and the return of expropriated properties that had belonged to the Patriarchate. We were aware that the Foundations Law that President Sezer vetoed would resolve some of the property issues, but there are other property issues, as well. Concerns remained about the ability to elect a new Patriarch and citizenship issues that would arise. Halki has been closed so long, and the community has shrunk so much that it has few Turkish priests and risks dying out. This result would be good neither for the diversity on which Turkey has so long prided itself nor for relations with the Greek-American community.

¶5. (C) The GOT, Apakan responded, had shown flexibility nearly three years ago, when non-Turkish members were added to the Synod. The GOT's decision to look the other way was deliberate; it was not, as some believe, a bureaucratic error. Two years ago, when FM Gul met Bakoyannis, he explained that the GOT had looked at how Halki could be reopened under existing Turkish law, and conveyed on paper the proposal that Halki's reopening take place under an Istanbul university. He added that a number of Greek diplomats believe this would be a fine solution. Ambassador

said he understands that Bartholomeus had previously agreed to this proposal and might again if he were truly convinced that it would result in reopening Halki. A positive step, either now or immediately after parliamentary elections, would be for the GOT to assure Bartholomeus that it will not stand in the way of the Synod electing the next Patriarch, and will resolve the citizenship issue in a sympathetic manner. There was a similar precedent in 1947. Apakan was fully aware of the precedent; the GOT would not obstruct the election of any Patriarch.

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